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THE ZICK-ZACK

PAULINE BOISOT AND BLANCHE FLETCHER*
La Grange, Illinois

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Shipman, a good fellow, not overscrupulous in conscience JOHN
Carpenter CHARLES
Cook, a man who could bake well a pie.
Merchant, a distinguished man, who spoke his opinions pompously SIR PHILIP
Squire, a lover, courteous and lowly ROGER
Page, accompanying Sir Philip BEATRICE (a novice)
Wife of Bathe, a large bold-faced woman who could talk well
in company ALISOUF

TIME: June, 1370.

PLACE: The deck of "The Maudelayne."

(The Shipman, the Carpenter, and the Cook are discovered toward the left, talking.)

Shipman: Well, boys, a fair beginning. Now let us 'ope for a safe return.

Carpenter: We are sailing well before the wind. *(To Cook, seated)* Up! man, and look around. That's the last land you'll see for a fortnight. Why trifle with that beast? Cats are common enough, aren't they?

Cook (rising): 'E's as lively as a cricket. Never a rat will venture into my kitchen while 'e's around. I feed 'im; 'e protects me.

Carp.: That's a fair bargain for you. I only 'ope 'e'll do 'is duty.

(Enter Merchant from right, carrying a bird cage all wrapped up.)

Merchant: Shipman, I have here the most precious article on your boat. It is a rare bird I am fetching to the good King Charles of France. Where can I keep it safely?

* Pupils in the Lyons Township High School.

Ship.: Ye'd better keep it in your cabin. Charles, you're a carpenter. What are you 'ere for? Fetch your tools and drive a peg into the wall of Sir Philip's cabin.

Carp.: I'll do it without delay.

(*Exit Carpenter, right; Merchant following.*)

Merch. (*admiringly*): 'Tis a fine bird, a rare bird, a beautiful singer!

(*Exit Merchant, right.*)

Ship.: A worthy gentleman.

Cook.: Yes, and a good man of business. 'Is bargains never fail to bring 'im profit. What other travelers 'ave we on the boat?

Ship.: The young Squire who was the life of our party on the way to Canterbury is 'ere. You remember 'im, and 'is father?

Cook.: Yes. What is 'is errand?

Ship.: 'E refuses to state. I believe 'e is planning something dishonorable.

Cook.: 'Twould be best to watch 'im. And are there any others of our acquaintance?

Ship.: Yes, one more, whom we met at the Southwerk Inn. The woman of Bathe has been troubled by deafness, and is going to seek the advice of French physicians.

Cook.: It promises to be a jolly company.

Ship.: There is also a page with Sir Philip.

Cook.: 'E was unaccompanied on the pilgrimage.

Ship. (*after gazing into distance*): The towers of Dartmouth are growing dim. "The Maudelayne" makes fair speed.

Cook.: It will soon be time to dine. I must go down and pluck the fowl.

(*Exit Cook, left, limping, carrying cat.*)

Ship.: That cook is a good-natured fellow. I 'ope I can take 'im with me on all my trips.

(*Enter Squire from right, quietly, carrying bird cage.*)

Ship.: I greet you, young sir.

Squire (*nervously, concealing cage*): Where is my baggage?

Ship.: I will 'ave it carried to your room. (*Aside.*) 'E is stealing the bird. I knew 'e was a rogue.

(Exit Shipman, left. Squire sets cage on floor, and gives bird a caraway seed. Bird thereupon sings: "Ter-oo-le-loo-le-loo.")

Enter Beatrice at this signal, disguised as a page, right.)

Page: Roger! Is it all safe? I heard the call.

Squire: Yes, love, we are quite alone.

Page: To think that we are together, sailing over the beautiful blue ocean, to France and freedom!

Squire: All the world for ourselves just as it was three years ago, Beatrice, when you were fifteen, and before I left you to go on that long expedition.

Page: It is hard to believe that we are really here. I fear my dear Madame Eglentyne is quite distressed. Her belief in me will be entirely shattered, for I am sure she trusted me. Do you suppose she knows why I slipped away in that manner?

Squire: When we reach the French court we will send her a message. In it you can say why you prefer my company to hers. I am sure she would trust you with Sir Philip. In the meantime we will concern ourselves with other matters. I have eyes and thoughts for only one.

Page (after slight pause): How surprised Aunt Isabella will be when she sees us, especially since I am wearing this disguise. She has begged me to visit her many times, always promising to present me at court. Did you ever meet Aunt Isabella?

Squire: I saw her once when she was visiting you years ago, shortly after your mother's death, when you and your father were living alone.

Page: She is a dear aunt, and she was always kind to me. She comforted me greatly in my sorrow. But she has never heard of my father's death (Paris is so many leagues away, you know), and I am sure she would not have wished me to enter a convent.

Squire: Why did you ever consent?

Page: When my father died, so soon after your departure, I had no friend left, no one to turn to, except Madame Eglentyne. She took me away with her into the convent. I was very unhappy, but I saw no alternative. I thought you had forgotten me, or else had been killed in Picardy.

Squire: Forgotten you! My thoughts have been only of you every day through these long years. I have toiled for you, I have fought for you, I have dreamed of you. After I had given thanks at Canterbury for my safe return, I was bent on seeking you. 'Twas a good angel who sent you on that pilgrimage.

Page: 'Twas Madame Eglentyne.

Squire: I have seen many fair maidens, but none other found a place in my heart. Are you sorry that you left the sheltering walls of the convent for my sake?

Page: The thought of these days with you was the only ray of sunshine to me on the pilgrimage. Last night, in my eagerness, I arose at one, and gathering up a few garments I crept softly down the corridor, my conscience pricking me the while. It was not an easy task to swing open the massive doors, and go out into the dark, mysterious night. But I knew you would be waiting, and I did it for your sake.

Squire: Sir Philip and I had been ready with our horses for some time, secreted behind the arbor, before you came.

Page: Never did I have such a wild ride before. The wind was cold, and I did not think we would ever reach the boat.

Squire: Are you still chilled? I will fetch your cloak.

Page: No! No! That would not be safe. I, myself, will go below.

(Exit Page, right. After pause, enter Wife of Bathe, left.)

Squire: Good morrow, Mistress Alisoun.

Wife of Bathe (surprised): Can it be the Squire? You certainly look well and 'appy.

Squire: It is a great pleasure to renew old acquaintances. The Shipman spoke so well of his boat when we were at Southwerk that there are several of that company here now.

Bathe: Are you bound for a visit in France?

Squire: I am going to the court.

Bathe: I am going even farther than Paris. After I consult the most famous French doctors, I will go down into Italy. I intend to do everything I can for my deafness.

Squire: It is sad that you are so troubled.

Bathe: Perhaps you 'ave not noticed it. It is only a slight affliction, and I try to conceal it.

Squire: That is right.

Bathe: However, it tries me greatly at times, and I am going to do my best to overcome it.

Squire: I hope you will succeed.

(*Bird unexpectedly sings: "Ter-oo-le-loo-le-loo."*)

Bathe (*surprised*): What 'ave you there?

(*Enter Page, right.*)

Page (*astonished at seeing Bathe*): Did you call me?

Bathe: 'Ere's a gentle youth. (*Shakes him.*) Is 'e your page?

Squire: No—she's—I—

Page: Sir Philip, mistress, is my master.

Bathe: 'Ow long 'ave you been with 'im? 'Ave you carried 'is arms in many tournaments?

Page: I have known him for three years.

Bathe: You were not with 'im on the pilgrimage?

Page: No.

(*Squire, in the background, is nervous.*)

Bathe: Do you like to joust and fight?

Page (*after a pause*): Yes.

Bathe: Truly a valiant lad. 'Ow far can you send an arrow?

Page: A fair distance.

Bathe: Is it 'ard for you to speak?

(*Enter Merchant, left.*)

Bathe (*looking sharply at Page*): I 'ope you will be better company next time we meet. (*Turns toward Merchant.*) Good-day, Sir Philip.

Merch.: Sooth to say, here is Mistress Alisoun.

Squire (*to Page, talking at one side*): She suspects you.

Page: Is not my disguise complete?

Squire: To me, yes, but she seems very observing.

Page: Why did you call me?

Squire: Before I could remove the bird Mistress Alisoun met me and I could not go. The bird sang of its own accord.

Page: Let us go.

Squire: I will be more careful.

(Exeunt Squire and Page, right.)

Merch.: I am on a voyage which I hope will be very advantageous to me. I have just stored away carefully in my cabin a most precious bird, which I am carrying to his majesty, the King of France. If it pleases his fancy, he will doubtless give me a fabulous sum. It is a small bird with plumage of lavender and white with black markings. It is called a Zick-Zack. I found it in London, which was very unusual, because its native haunts are in the deserts of India and Africa. It was perched in a tree in front of my home, and I caught it with a net.

Bathe: No wonder you take such good care of it. What did you say it was called?

Merch.: A Zick-Zack. The carpenter has driven a peg in my room, and the cage hangs on it. I am sure that no harm can come to the bird. The sun is shining on it now, and it is singing right merrily.

Bathe: I should like very much to see it. I 'ave 'eard the song of one bird on board.

Merch.: I will fetch the little fellow for you at once.

(Exit Merchant, left.)

Bathe: That page is in disguise.

(Enter Shipman, right.)

Bathe: O sir, is not this a favorable wind?

Ship.: Yes, 'ave you met all the passengers?

Bathe: I 'ave just been talking to the Squire and 'is Page. 'E is a singular fellow.

Ship.: I'm afraid 'e is plotting against us.

Bathe: That is it. That is why 'e is disguised.

Ship.: I do not think 'e is disguised, though 'e 'as villainous plans. 'E is the same as 'e was on the pilgrimage.

Bathe: 'E was not on the pilgrimage.

Ship.: Can you 'ave forgotten 'is songs and tales?

Bathe: Do you mean the Squire? I meant the Page. 'E is the one that is disguised.

Ship.: Oh, the Page! I 'ad not noticed 'im. 'E is accompanying Sir Philip.

Bathe: 'E seems a delicate lad, and 'e 'as such a soft voice. 'E talks very little, and I could learn nothing of 'is affairs.

Ship.: 'E is a fitting companion for the Squire.

Bathe: And what is more, I think 'e is a girl.

Ship.: It cannot be!

Bathe: I am sure it is true. She 'elps 'im in 'is crimes. What is the Squire planning to do?

Ship.: 'E will not tell me what is the purpose of 'is journey, but I think 'e is a thief! I saw 'im not long ago carrying a bird which belongs to Sir Philip, the Merchant. 'E was much confused when 'e saw me.

Bathe: I saw 'im with a bird, too, and 'e tried to conceal it when I drew near.

Ship.: It was a very precious bird.

Bathe: Sir Philip plans to sell it to the King of France.

Ship.: It will bring a great deal of money.

Bathe: 'Ow much, think you?

Ship.: A vast amount of gold.

Bathe: Could you go to the court in France?

Ship.: Could we gain possession of the bird?

Bathe: We will do it!

Ship.: If you will keep it through the voyage, I will accompany you to the court of France, and we will divide between us the money we receive.

Bathe: I will secure the bird before an hour is past.

(Exit Bathe, left.)

Ship. (rubbing hands): I long to feel that gold.

(Enter Merchant, right.)

Ship.: 'Ow is the little bird?

Merch.: Quite safe, quite safe.

Ship.: 'As Charles driven the peg?

Merch.: Yes, so that the bird can hang high.

Ship.: 'E must need 'ang 'igh to keep out of the way of the cook's cat.

Merch.: I will watch out for it.

(Exit Shipman, left. Enter Squire, right.)

Squire: I have hung the bird in your room.

Merch.: Does he obey you well?

Squire: Every time I give him a caraway seed he utters his call.

Merch.: Where is Beatrice now?

Squire: We have decided that it would be best for her to remain hidden as much as possible. I am afraid that the Wife of Bathe has penetrated her disguise.

Merch.: She makes a good page, does she not?

Squire: Yes, but I long for the time when we shall reach France, and she can lay aside her page's robes.

(Enter Page, right.)

Merch.: Here is our little page now.

Page: Yes, my lord, how can I serve you?

Merch.: In no way, my boy, just now. I must go below.
(Aside) I think you will be undisturbed for a few moments.

(Exit Merchant, right.)

Page (with a low sweeping bow to Squire): What is your will, master?

Squire (rushing up to her): I am glad you are not a real page.

Page: My lord, is this not undue familiarity?

Squire: Oh, forget that you are a page and be my Beatrice again!

Page: I am not your Beatrice. I am a page *(grasping his arm)*.
What do you hear? *(Creeps behind him.)*

(Enter Wife of Bathe, left.)

Bathe (slipping behind Squire): Well, what is doing? *(Shaking Page.)* Boy, have you found your tongue?

(Enter Merchant, right, much agitated.)

Merch.: Where is my bird? Who has taken away my treasure?

All: Gone!

Bathe: No one on board could 'ave stolen it! You must 'ave made some mistake.

Merch.: It is true. The cage is empty, and the bird is nowhere in the room.

Squire: You should notify the Shipman, and he will have the boat searched.

Merch.: I can never get another.

(Exit Merchant, left, clasping head; Squire and Page following.)

Bathe (calling after): You ought to look in the storeroom and inquire from all the passengers. Some one might 'ave taken it to sell.

(Enter Shipman, right.)

Ship.: What is this commotion? 'Tis not possible that you 'ave done the deed, and been discovered?

Bathe (whispering): They know the bird is gone. They are going to search the ship. The bird is in my room now. I will put it in a bonnet box, and always keep it with me.

Ship.: Take good care of it.

Bathe: The merchant is looking for you. Go and find 'im, and 'unt carefully.

Ship.: Yes I'll 'unt well in every crack and corner, but 'e'll never see that bird again.

Bathe: What will Sir Philip think 'as 'appened to the bird?

Ship.: I 'ave a plan. It shall be blamed on the cook's little cat.

Bathe: That is good. While I was catching the bird, two of its lavender feathers came out in my 'and. I will fetch the cat and bring it, with the feathers, to the merchant. If I tell 'im that I found them together, 'e will think that 'is little bird is eaten.

Ship.: 'Asten, prithee.

(Exit Bathe, left. Enter Squire, right.)

Squire: Shipman, we wish your aid. Sir Philip's bird is gone. The cage stands open, and the bird has disappeared completely. Someone must have opened the cage. Will you have the boat searched?

Ship.: I will look at once.

(Enter Merchant and Page, right.)

Ship.: You would best consult all the passengers. 'Twas a valuable bird, was it not?

Merch.: It was. I had never seen its like, outside of a pamphlet, before. It would sell at any place for much money.

(Enter Bathe, left, carrying cat and feathers.)

Bathe: What do you suppose 'as 'appened? I found this animal in the stern of the boat, with these two feathers by 'im!

Squire (taking feathers to merchant): Alas and well away! Your little bird is gone!

Page: Oh!

Ship.: Give me the cat.

Ship. (to cat): 'Ereafter you shall stay in the kitchen. It is too expensive to feed you on rare birds. Rats are good enough for you.

Merch.: However, my bird may have escaped, leaving these feathers. Let us hunt more.

(Exeunt Bathe and Shipman, right.)

Squire: Never shall I forgive myself if the bird cannot be recovered.

Merch.: In no way was it through a fault of yours.

Squire: I feel that I am to blame. I must have left the door of the cage ajar, since I carried the bird about so much, using its call.

Merch.: I know that you are not guilty, but neither is the cat. Human hands must have removed the bird.

Page: There is treachery on this boat. I would that we were in France.

Squire: However, let us search thoroughly. I will go this way, you look on that deck.

(Exit Squire, left. Exit Merchant, right. Page hesitates, looks after both, and follows Squire. Enter Bathe, right, carrying a bonnet box; seats herself.)

Bathe: I do not feel like 'unting. *(Sets box beside her.)*

(Enter Shipman, right.)

Ship. (crossing stage, winks at Bathe): I'm 'unting 'ard.

Bathe: I 'ope you find it.

(Exit Shipman, left. Enter Carpenter, right, searching.)

Carp.: I am afraid I 'ave nailed the poor little fellow up in a cupboard.

Bathe: Then 'e is dead by now. You should not be so careless.
(Pushes bonnet box under her chair.)

(Exit Carpenter, left. Enter Merchant, left.)

Merch.: I am grieved to think that I cannot show you the bird. It was most beautiful.

Bathe: That is very sad. *(Pushes bonnet box.)*

(Exit Merchant, right.)

Bathe (to bird): You're safely 'idden, my little fellow.

Bird: Ter-oo-le-loo-le-loo.

(Bathe is much confused; looks about her, and spreads her skirts over the bird.)

Enter Merchant, right; Squire and Page, left.)

Squire: It was the bird!

Page: Where can it be?

Merch.: I felt that we would find it.

Squire: Woman, where is the bird? The call was here.

Bird: Ter-oo-le-loo-le-loo.

Page (forgetting her disguise, rushes to Bathe, drags her from the chair, and brings out the cage): Here is the dear. *(Looking in cage.)*
Give me a caraway seed, Roger. *(Roger gives her one. Bird sings.)*

Merch. (to Bathe): Where did you find my bird?

(Bathe flees, left.)

Merch.: Is he unharmed? *(Takes bird.)*

Page: He has merely lost a few feathers.

Squire: The Wife of Bathe is guilty. I will fetch her.

Merch.: I will aid you. Perhaps she will not wish to come.

(Exeunt Squire and Merchant, left.)

Page: I forgot myself and did not act like a page. My disguise will no longer protect me.

(Enter Carpenter, right.)

Page: The little bird is found.

(Enter Merchant and Shipman, followed by Squire and Bathe all talking.)

Ship.: 'Twas done for the price it would bring. We did not mean to 'arm it.

Bathe (from rear beside Squire): We meant to sell it in France, just as you 'ad planned to do.

Ship.: And as 'e will do.

Merch.: I will keep the bird locked in my cabin, hereafter.

Ship.: You need fear us no longer. 'Tis sad our plans did not succeed.

Bathe (to Squire): We did this deed because first we saw you carrying the bird, planning, we thought, to steal it yourself. But I have learned since *(with a significant look at the Page)* that you used it as a signal.

(Enter Cook in background, right, carrying cat. Page lays aside her disguise.)

Squire (advancing): That it was, and this is my lady, Mistress Beatrice. *(Leading her forward. Beatrice courtseys.)* We are to be married in France.

Bathe (taking Beatrice's hands): I knew long ago that you were a girl. I am sure I wish you joy.

Squire: Our cares have vanished. I shall not miss my page.

Bathe: Then 'ere's to a peaceful journey!

Ship.: It is dinner time. Let us forget our troubles, and be merry.

Cook: A game pie awaits you.

[Curtain]

Here ends our simple play,
Alas and wellaway.